

MINORITY VOICES IN POWER RANGERS MOVIE: A STUDY OF POPULAR LITERATURE

E. Ngestirosa. E.W.K¹, M. Fitratullah²

Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia

ngestirosa@teknokrat.ac.id¹, mosespetergeorgean@gmail.com²

Abstract: *The aim of this study is to respond the controversial issues toward the movie of Power Rangers considered harmful for children and to expose some important issues which relate to minority groups. These issues links to liberties which include freedom of life stated in United States' Bill of Human Right. This study applies popular literature approach and Hall's representation theory. Research result shows that the minority voices reveal the positive image of minority groups such as the powerful and independent individual. Then voices also portray courage, confidence, humanity, care and love, friendship and team working, trust and support, justice and anti-bullying. Those issues are gathered in the scenes from the image of the acceptance of color people and the right of LGBT represented by some characters.*

Keywords: *freedom; minority; movie; power Rangers; voices*

1. INTRODUCTION

Movie and popular literature are linked one another. Film may also be connected to someone's memory. Foucault stated that movie can actually be used to obstruct popular memory (Grainge, 2003:2). The power of movie for presenting the message in the form of moving picture could be easily grasped by people's memory. The popularity of movie proves the tight connection of movie and culture in producing cultural image to the society.

Movie as popular representation of social culture's development has tried to convey complex issues (Cottle, 2000; Curran & Morley, 2006; Lewis, 2005; Sen & Hill T, 2007; Stadler & McWilliam, 2009). The movie adapts the cultural and social, and it gathers more information from what people like. The fantasy and dream presented in moving media are mostly favourite for inviting people attention. As a message sender, movies not only provide a narrative for specific discourses of race, gender, sex, and class, but they also provide shared experience, a common starting point from which diverse audiences can dialogue about these common issues (Hooks, 1996). Finally, movie is considered useful to deliver message of cultural and social issues in the society.

One of popular movies that gathered much attention from the viewer is superhero movies. This kind of movie has many viewers in the world. Superhero movies have been in US cinema since the 1930s, with characters such as Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon, and Superman.

One of the most intriguing superhero movies in 2017 is Power Rangers movie. In general, American movies tend to present the life and glory of America in solving the existing issues, and Power Rangers movie also tries to see the other sides of teenager's life and minorities in the US.

Thus, through critical analysis, this study aims to give information of the different life of the minority groups and their freedom of thought in Power Rangers movie.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Representation Theory

Representation theory is used since movie is not stated as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but a form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak (Hall, 1998:225). According to Hall (1996), representation is one of the important practices of producing culture. Culture is a very broad concept, involving cultural experience. It means that people in the society can share the same experiences, codes, culture, and language. The theory of representation is used in translating sign found in the society such as, dialogue, writing, video, movie, and photography. Hall (1998:225; 1996:73) states that representation was understood on the basis of the way words functioned as signs within language, but meaning often depends on larger units of analysis - narratives, statements, groups of images, whole discourses which operate across a variety of texts. The statement means that representation previously functioned as words in a language could be understood as signs that could be read by viewers.

2.2 Semiotics Theory

Semiotics is a study of sign system and deals with the transmission of code in communication (Chandler, 2007; Cobey, 2005:185; Hawkes, 2003:103). Roland Barthes adapted Saussure's model of the sign focusing on denotation at the expense of connotation and it was left to subsequent theorists to offer an account of this important dimension of meaning (Chandler, 2007). In semiotics, denotation and connotation are terms describing the relationship between the signifier and its signified. In this framework connotation is a sign which derives from the signifier of a denotative sign. This tends to suggest that denotation is an underlying and primary meaning. Denotation tends to be described as the definitional, literal, obvious or commonsense meaning of a sign (Chandler, 2007:137-138; Cobey, 2005; Hawkes, 2003).

The use of semiotics in Barthes theory tries to incorporate some aspects in the movie when having to deal with minority voices in Power Rangers movie 2017. The study investigates the character which carries a lot of connotations, and it is helpful when seeing how the movie constructs some messages from image in the movie. This study then interprets certain symbols, sign, or trademarks as language and thereby recognizes the underlining meaning behind language focusing on minority voices. The meaning, hopefully, can give broader ideas what the perspective of American culture is for the reader.

2.3 American Cinema

The cinema in the United States of America performs and brings the fundamental issue as it is stated in the Declaration of Independence that 'all men are equal'. It is then translated into freedom of thought in the social life to voice the minority groups. Cottle (2000:11) noted that the need of media develops to legitimize systems of power and domination in the society because media can explore the production and circulation of popular cultural imagery and artistic forms. Through film media, American delivers message about the America-ness that have promise to the equality of all men, but the practice does something different. This studies reveal that movies featuring non-white actors are in fact limited in their financial success, theater distribution, and range of genres (Lee, 2014: 8). This reality shows the discrimination of American business in movie to the minority groups.

2.4 Minority Groups and Minority Voices

A minority group denotes to a group of people that is distinguished from the majority group who hold the dominant power in the social life. The majority group usually have relation with the minority group, and it has more power and control to the minority group (Laurie & Khan, 2016:3-4).

Freedom of life translated from freedom of thought is a fundamental human right that protects the autonomy of the human conscience. The United States had actually announced the articulation of independence, freedom and liberty from the founding fathers of America such as Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, Madison and Washington (Paul, 2014:213; Tesis, 2004:12). This proves that freedom of life has been sounded since the history of the United States as a multiculturalism country. The racial controversy is still debatable nowadays among the American society. It still happens, even the development has been made to accommodate both white and color race. The country respects to execute an idea of unity and equality by depicting pictures of acceptance. There are some media used to perform how harmony could be power for a great nation. One of media that can accomplish this idea is movie. It can share meaningful entertainment for the viewer; in addition, it can also convey certain mission.

3. DISCUSSIONS OF MAIN THEMES

Power Rangers movie 2017 is a popular movie which attracts viewer's attention to the issue of minority groups from the scene and the characters. Power Rangers movie tells about five teenagers from the little town of Angel Grove. They are accidentally reunited by aliens named Zordon and his assistant Alpha five who make them super heroes. They are given power coin to morph into super hero. It happens when each coin has energy to increase the strength of those teenagers. As heroes, called 'Power Rangers', they combat enemy and save the world. In fact, the movie does not only focus on the hero as the savior of the world, but it also delivers some messages through the minorities. They are acceptance of minority people and the right for LGBT.

3.1 Acceptance of Minority People

First Scene (07.07-08.20)



The image in the scene is in the class where there are students of various backgrounds are sitting, discussing and standing. The class looks crowded and the teacher does not exist inside. Billy, young African American boy, having autism disorder, sets his chair and looks busy by organizing his crayon on the table. By neglecting the condition around which looks crowded with laugh and student's discussion, he is not bothered at all. Being distracted by the silence and autism of Billy, Colt, young white American boy suddenly comes and annoys him, by taking and breaking Billy's crayon. Colt also abuses him in front of the class. As Billy best friend, Jason disagrees with Colt's attitude. He confronts Colt by pushing him away from Billy and slaps his face. Jason asks Colt not to get closer with them.

The first Power Rangers Movie scene appears to be the perspective of America on the minorities nowadays. The movie clearly depicts the reality that white people perceive negatively to this minority group. The movie constructs the ideas that the United States of America has a respect to the minority people. Jason represents American government to voice acceptance of color people like Billy, an African American boy. People in America can accept someone's idea when the thought is reasonable for all. This scene depicts the equality and

acceptance of color people as the application of freedom of thought. This is also as the reflection of equality as it is stated in Declaration of Independence, “all men are equal”.

Second Scene (12.28-14.15)



In this scene, Jason is a former successful athlete. This is seen from the news on the fridge that Jason is the golden boy of the football team. On the other hand, Jason is recognized to have bad temper.

This second scene constructs the perception on the new picture of Black people nowadays. An African American group has been in history from the slave ancestor, this influences White perception to denigrate on this group. The first Black president, Obama, in the United States cannot stop this perception toward minority groups. The discrimination still continues until now. Bill's character negotiates his existence by having friendship with Jonas, the White. In Bill character, Black is the sample that this group must be respected.

Third Scene (50:52-51.29)



This image pictures the Zach Taylor, an Asian American, who becomes Black Power Rangers. Zach takes care of his mother in the room by speaking Mandarin to his mother. His mother questions about why he is getting home late. There is no respond from Zach. His mother doubts for Zach's attendance at school. She has expression of worrying his son for his

attitude of not going to school. Without answering the question, Zach, on the other hand, asks her to be relaxed and stay calm on the bed.

The image from the movie clearly exposes the Chinese-American as one of the minorities who experience discrimination and have lower status than Anglo-American. However, the appearance of Zach as superhero is the same as white-people hero; he looks handsome and is truly a well-built Chinese. Hollywood whitewashing has been discourse for popular movie and this movie proves different image of Chinese. In addition, the history of Chinese-American has noted that they have always positive spirit and struggle for the challenges, so that this minority group can stand the same level as others.

Fourth Scene (08.33-09.20)



The image pictures Trini and her friends in the class. Trini, a Chicano girl, is expelled by her friends from the group. They thought that Trini is only just a trouble maker who makes one of their friends get injured. Trini thought that she does not make a big problem, but only needs for attention. They do not accept Trini's reason for what she makes to Ty, the one who gets injured. For Trini, she deserves to be injured for the thing she does previously. For that reason, they thought Trini is not part of them anymore. Trini looks angry, and to express her emotion, she cuts her hair by herself.

The images presented in the movie about Chicano, in the character of Trini, are the common image given by Anglo-American. Trini, the Yellow Power Rangers, is performed to be the hero in the movie. It is contradicted with the people perception about Chicano. What is popularly recognized that Chicanos have tended to be largely the product of their uncertain position in America. It has also been in common that Anglos do not respect their Chicanos heritage. Chicanos have finally become a disdained minority in the United States of America. They are sometimes claimed as a stranger in their own country. That reality has influenced Chicano cultural expression (Eysturoy & Gurpegui, 1990:50 ; Haslam, 1970:696). To have

Trini Kwan, a Chicano, in Hollywood film as one of the superheroes in Power Rangers movie is a bigger step for Hollywood-moviemaker to respond to what the minorities want and need.

3.2 The Right for LGBT

Fifth Scene (13.16-14.45)



In the scene (13.16), Kimberly and Trini are having lunch at the cafe. Among the rows of cafe chairs, they duel over the last bite of a chocolate-chip muffin. Both girls play around for the muffin they have ordered using a fork. The game they use with the fork and speed is to grab a small piece of muffin. They seem happy fighting over a small piece of muffin and finally admit the greatness of Trini who manages to take the muffin by using a fork. After Trini eats it off, while looking extremely smug, Kimberly laughs and offers to get them another one. The barista behind the counter who takes her order tells her, "You and your girlfriend are really cute." It takes Kimberly a moment to process what the barista just said and she shakes her head. "Oh no, we're not together," she starts to say, but the barista has already moved away to grab the muffin out of the case.

There are two moments when Kimberly and Trini are considered to attract each other. Kimberly as a woman tends to be physically, romantically, emotionally attracted to Trini. This can be classified as a lesbian because Trini has the characteristics of falling in love with another woman. The pictures of accepting lesbian that shows the gestures of welcoming the same sex is once again shown. The scene represents different reality of lesbian life that is considered to be negative. Kimberly and Trini are superhero women who become the savior in the movies. They fight the enemy of the world and save millions of people in the world. They also show respect, confidence, honesty and courage. It is far from the controversial issues which considers lesbian as the enemy of the society. America respects the life of the minorities who have different sexual orientation. Trini represents Chicana-lesbian who actually wants to survive and transform in the hard life of living in the United States. Being lesbian for Trini may be her escape for her inability for living in the society. Cruz (2001:668) stated that Chicana-lesbian transform her sexual disorder for having emancipation and

survival in the society. The discrimination from the white forces Trini to be lesbian and she is welcomed and has warm life in her new environment with her girlfriend.

4. CONCLUSION

Power Rangers movie is considered useful to deliver some issues related to the multiculturalism society that exists in the United States. Besides that, the film deliver a message for children to be independent, loving, couraging with each other. In addition, the movie also exhibits good perspectives for the minority groups. It voices their dream to be seen the same as other White-Americans. The discrimination that still continues must be eliminated and it is in line with the ideal of American ancestor to make American as the place for people of color. The future research may focus on the connection of the myth and superheroes movie from the history of the United States.

5. REFERENCES

- Chandler, D. (2007). *Semiotics the Basics*. New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Cobey, P. (2005). *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics and Linguistics*. (P. Cobey, Ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Cottle, S. (2000). *Ethnic Minorities and The Media: Changing Cultural Boundaries*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Cruz, C. (2001). Toward an Epistemology of a Brown Body. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14(5), 657–669. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390110059874>
- Curran, J., & Morley, D. (2006). *Media & Cultural Theory*. (Routledge, Ed.). New York.
- Eysturoy, A. O., & Gurpegui, J. A. (1990). Chicano Literature: Introduction and Bibliography. *American Studies International*, 28(1), 48–82.
- Fiske, J. (1987). *Television Culture: Popular Pleasures and Politics*. New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Grainge, P. (2003). Memory and Popular Film. In P. Grainge (Ed.). Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press.
- Hall, S. (1996). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publication.
- Hall, S. (1998). Cultural Identity and Diaspora. In *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Haslam, G. (1970). ; Por La Causa ! Mexican-American Literature Author. *College English*, 31(7), 695–700.

- Hawkes, T. (2003). *Structuralism and Semiotics*. New York: Routledge.
- Hooks, B. (1996). *Real to Real*. New York: Routledge.
- Laurie, T., & Khan, R. (2016). The Concept of Minority for the Study of Culture. *Continuum*, 31(1), 92–103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2016.1264110>
- Lee, K. (2014). Race in Hollywood : Quantifying the Effect of Race on Movie Performance, (December), 1–18.
- Lewis, J. (2005). *Language Wars, The Role of Media and Culture in Gobal Terror and Political Violence*. London: Pluto Press.
- Paul, H. (2014). *The Myths that Made America : an Introduction to American Studies*. Verlag: Bielefeld.
- Sen, K., & Hill T, D. (2007). *Media, Culture and Politics in Indonesia*. Jakarta: Equinox Publishing.
- Stadler, J., & McWilliam, K. (2009). *Screen Media: Anlysing Film and Television*. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.
- Tsesis, A. (2004). *The Thirteenth Amendment and American Freedom: A Legal History*. New York: New York University Press.